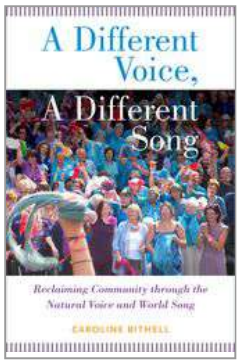

A Different Voice, A Different Song: Reclaiming Community through the Natural Voice and World Song
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Scenes from the Global Village

Singing Camps and Travels

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Abstract and Keywords

Chapter 8 pursues the theme of community in relation to the notion of the global village. The Unicorn Natural Voice Camp (held in England) and a set of overseas singing tours organised by Village Harmony (in Corsica, Bosnia, and Georgia) serve as detailed case studies. The analysis is framed by perspectives derived from the critical literature on travel and tourism. It explores the dynamics of "being there" for tour participants and the symbolic meanings that may be attached to their presence by the host community, and reveals how transnational networks contribute to the sustainability of local communities, and vice versa. The chapter ends by revisiting questions of identity in the contemporary world, together with ideas about how the performing arts offer themselves as a prime site for experimenting with new ways of living and being.

Keywords: global village, Unicorn Natural Voice Camp, Village Harmony, Georgia, Bosnia, Corsica, community, identity, tourism, transnational network

The Singing Village

A steady stream of cars turns into the narrow lane that leads to the Dorset farm where, each summer, a colourful canvas village springs up to house the Unicorn Natural Voice Camp. The brightly striped, circular marquees, topped with pennants that flutter in the breeze, give the scene a quaint and vaguely medieval appearance. Smoke rises from the wood fires around which circles of smaller tents are beginning to form and steaming kettles greet new arrivals. Children run off to find friends from last year while their parents establish their

temporary home. The old hands have already set to work constructing makeshift wooden trestle-tables and dresser-like contraptions where washing up can be done and pots and pans stored. By nightfall the camp has settled down. Children, warm and drowsy after stories and cocoa, snuggle contentedly into their sleeping bags. From the main marquee come strains of “Bele Mama, Bele Mama”. More voices join in this simple verse from West Africa and soon an eight-part round is in full flight. Swinging paraffin lamps cast shadows on the canvas walls as three hundred people, now arranged in two huge circles facing one another, enact a simple greeting dance. Smiles spread as old friends are recognised and new faces welcomed.

The next day, under a hot sun, the camp is buzzing with a different kind of energy. In the Creativity Area, a wooden climbing frame is taking shape, while some of the younger children, boys as well as girls, are learning to knit. A group of teenagers is engrossed in a game of volleyball; later they will go canoeing on the nearby river. From several different marquees comes the sound of singing: the straining discords of a Balkan song; a spirited Zulu chorus; an exuberant arrangement of a Motown hit; the solid, earthy tones of an **(p.253)** American shape note song; and the novel harmonies of a new composition by Ali Burns. In the café tent, the lunchtime team is busy preparing organic soups and salads. A member of the site crew is chopping wood for the stove that will heat the water for the showers. Already a small boy is asking his mother: “Will we be coming to this camp again next year?”

As the week progresses, each circle will give itself a name. Some will construct an entrance arch out of willow, hung with decorations made by the children; others will make flags or banners. At night, the communal spaces around the campfires will be lit with lanterns and visitors from other circles may join the groups that gather to sing, tell stories, or simply talk. Plots are hatched for surprise performances at the Cabaret Night in the café and more serious rehearsals become the focus for offerings for Performance Night in the main marquee. Relations with the nearby village—a tranquil rural retreat with a population of little more than a thousand—are carefully nurtured and on Tuesday evening the village church will be bursting at the seams for the traditional concert and sing-along offered annually by the campers.[1]

Half a world away, in the Caucasus mountains, two white minibuses that have seen better days wend their precarious way along the narrow, bone-shaking, unpaved road hacked out of the rock face that leads into Upper Svaneti. Their occupants, hot and weary after the overnight train ride from Tbilisi to Zugdidi but exhilarated now as they draw near to their destination, catch their breath when a sudden bend offers a glimpse of the towering mountains that lie ahead, still glistening with snow in the bright summer sun. We are on our way to the tiny village of Lakhushdi, where we have been invited to play a part in the Feast of Limkheri. This village is a permanent home to several families, even if these

days many of the younger folk move away to the city in search of paid work, further education, or a more lively social life. For the winter months, these mountain villages lie deep in snow, cut off from the outside world. The medieval towers attached to many of the houses would, in the past, have provided refuge not only from marauding invaders from across the border but also from the frequent risk of avalanche (Figure 8.1).

Figure 8.1 Cluster of houses with towers, with neighbouring hamlet in the distance. Ushguli, Georgia, July 2010.

Source: Courtesy of Caroline Bithell.

The previous summer, travelling with different companions, I had continued on the rapidly deteriorating road for a further three hours or more to Ushguli, which, at an altitude of 2,200 meters, has the distinction of being the highest continuously inhabited settlement in Europe. In this world there are no shops, post offices, or doctor's surgeries. Few people have paid work. Electricity is a novelty. Food comes straight from the garden or the farm and kitchens are a constant hive of activity. Cows wander freely and often bed down on the stony, muddy pathways along which we grope our way back to our temporary homes in the pitch-black night. The only sounds are those of the natural and human world: rushing mountain streams provide a backdrop for the calls of birds, the humming of insects, the lowing of cattle, the chopping of wood, and the voices of children at play (Figure 8.2) (see web figures 08.01–08.07). **(p.254) (p.255)**

We spend most of our first few days in Lakhushdi working with the three elderly songmasters, trying to pin down the ancient pre-Christian chants with their untempered intervals and ever-shifting contours (Figure 8.3). When the feast day arrives, we set off early to climb the wooded hill to the tiny church. A ram has been ritually sacrificed and is now being prepared for the celebratory meal; a hefty metal cooking pot swings above a wood fire tended by the younger men. Inside the tiny stone sanctuary lit only by

candlelight, we can just make out the faded frescos and ornate icons. Our teachers have now assumed a priest-like role. Standing before the altar, they raise their voices in clashing harmonies and chant invocations as they pour libations of home-distilled *chacha* on the earthen floor. The sacred rituals complete, we reassemble on the grassy clearing next to the church and join hands for a series of round dances. A simple meal of bread, mutton, and cheese, to be washed down with a seemingly inexhaustible supply of wine and *chacha*, is then laid out on the ground beneath the trees and we pass the rest of the afternoon in a convivial mood filled with traditional games, toasts, and ever-more animated singing (Figure 8.4). The intensity of these shared moments of heightened empathy and carefree festivity will bind us together for the years to come (see web figures 08.08–08.11). **(p.256)**

Figure 8.2 Village houses and gardens. Ushguli, Georgia, July 2010.

Source: Courtesy of Caroline Bithell.

Figure 8.3 Songmasters Gigo Chamgeliani and Murad and Givi Pirtskhelani. Lakhushdi, Georgia, July 2011.

Source: Courtesy of Caroline Bithell.

Reclaiming Paradise: Of Fields, Festivals, and Foreign Shores

Figure 8.4 Givi Pirtskhelani distributes the roasted organs of a sacrificial ram. Feast of Limkheri, Lakhushdi, Georgia, July 2011.

Source: Courtesy of Caroline Bithell.

In previous chapters we have seen how songs from beyond one's normal, day-to-day habitat can become a very real and tangible part of one's own community, one's own horizons, one's own sense of identity; how singing and embodying these songs can lead to an appreciation of the cultures they represent and an empathy for those who sing them in their original settings; and how, with the songs acting as introduction and lynchpin, people may be brought into face-to-face contact with "others" with whom they would not otherwise have crossed paths. Increasing numbers of choir members are now choosing to devote their leisure time and material resources to pursuing these directions beyond the confines of their local community. Some set off on new adventures with fellow choir members; others strike out independently, perhaps finding a niche for themselves in the more fluid translocal or transnational formations where different networks intersect. New life experiences accumulate rapidly. For some of those attracted to the Unicorn camp, camping itself is a novel activity. Relatively independent overseas travel (as opposed to package tours) may also be a new and daunting prospect. **(p. 257)**

In this chapter, we follow some of these singers as they embark on another set of journeys. We explore the dynamics of the communities they find at their destination and the ways in which they, too, become temporary members of those communities. Some communities may, like the Unicorn camp, be entirely transient, reformed year by year by those drawn together from diverse starting points to recreate the imagined village. Others, like Ushguli and Lakhushdi, are permanently inhabited working villages that, for a designated part of the year, welcome into their midst small groups of guests, who for a few short weeks become part of local life in a way both sides deem mutually beneficial. In these journeys and sojourns, song may be the driving force and primary source of satisfaction; but beyond this, the very fact of living differently, away from one's habitual anchors, and of sharing most aspects of the daily routine with unrelated

others conspires to create a particular set of conditions that can lead to powerful transformative experiences.

This phenomenon is part of a broader trend of seeking out new ways to spend leisure time and to take holidays. It can also be viewed in the context of a more widespread hunger for a lost sense of community, of nostalgia for a past envisioned as simpler, freer, and more attuned to the rhythms of nature. At the same time it is clearly evocative of the metaphorical “global village” (as conceived by Marshall McLuhan in the 1960s) in which, aided by advances in travel and technology, different cultures are brought together in one place. And finally, it is also part of the postmodern story (as told by Arjun Appadurai) of the flows and scapes from which we construct our imagined or ideal worlds.

Tapping into the Festival Current

The festival format is well-suited to aspirations to recreate the global village. The multiplication of festivals across Europe in recent decades is testimony to the fact that the urge to step out of one’s ordinary life and experiment with different ways of being is no longer confined to the hippy fringe. The festivals that sprang up in Britain in the 1970s were very much part of a countercultural desire to reclaim the land and create an alternative world in which the conventions and constraints of everyday life could be left behind or conspicuously flouted. Yet, while an event like the Glastonbury Festival may have begun as “a serious attempt to stake out and remake Utopia in an English field” (Young 2010: 477), such events soon grew to gargantuan proportions. First held in 1970 with 1,500 attendees (whose £1 entrance fee also entitled them to free milk from the farm), today Glastonbury caters to around 180,000 people a year and is estimated to contribute £100 million annually to the British economy (Eavis 2011: 3). The British summer is now awash with hundreds of music festivals and alternative gatherings of all shapes and sizes, the most popular of which sell out within hours of tickets going on sale. As Philippa Bradley, **(p.258)** writing for the BBC Money Programme, puts it, “what started as flower power is now big business” (2012: n.p.).

Given the prevalence in festival-related literature of references to Utopia, Arcadia, and the Garden of Eden, and the festival movement’s bid in an earlier phase to reclaim what was once common land for the enjoyment of all, it is noteworthy that many festivals are held in the grounds of stately homes. For a few frenetic days, anyone able to afford a ticket (or find a gap in the fence) has access to gardens, lakes, and woodland where they may stumble on hidden corners transformed into enchanted dreamlands or surreal stage-sets. Those who take advantage of the opportunity to splash out on unusual items of clothing and perhaps have their hair braided or their skin decorated with henna tattoos become a visible part of the “scene”, even if, for many, this particular scene does not extend beyond the festival itself.

All of this is certainly part of the attraction of the WOMAD festival that, each July, draws a crowd of around 35,000 to Charlton Park in Wiltshire. Celebrating its thirtieth anniversary in 2012, WOMAD has become a Mecca for world music aficionados. If any festival has a claim to the title “Global Village”, then this is surely it. Not only are artists flown in from all corners of the globe but food, clothing, musical instruments, mirrors, rugs, wall-hangings, hand-crafted wooden furniture, and other artefacts from different parts of the world are on sale in a giant outdoor marketplace. From the outset, participation as a key to appreciation and understanding was a central feature of the WOMAD vision, together with a desire “to break open the distance between performer and audience” (Gabriel 2007: 17). As founder Peter Gabriel puts it in the short promotional trailer carried on the festival’s website, “people who get their hands dirty can feel it for themselves” (http://womad.co.uk/about, acc. June 16, 2013). The result—now a feature of many festivals but a new departure at the early WOMAD events—is a full programme of participatory workshops, led by the artists themselves, scheduled to run alongside the staged performances. Serendipitously—as if to underline the kinship with the natural voice creed—one of the workshop leaders featured in the trailer affirms the familiar maxim: “If you can walk, you can dance. If you can talk, you can sing. It is true.”[2]

While the Unicorn camp may in many ways be part of the same impulse that fuelled contemporary festival culture, it lies at the opposite end of the scale from many of the larger festivals that have become lucrative commercial enterprises, attracting clients who at times seem more bent on staging a global stag night than recreating Eden. At Unicorn there are no professional performers; no stages, banks of amplifiers, or lighting rigs; no beer tents, cash machines, or mobile phone masts; no thudding bass or pounding drums to keep you awake at night; no marauding teenagers tripping over your guy-ropes; no petty thieves ransacking your tent while you are off dancing; no professional promoters, corporate sponsorship, or media coverage. In this **(p.259)** sense, the camp and others like it may be seen as a revival of the original vision of a back-to-basics, do-it-yourself, safe and peaceful gathering of like-minded folk in an English field.

Theorising Travel and Tourism

A similar difference of ethos separates the overseas tours undertaken by the singers we are following here from other types of tourism, even if they share in part the same root impulse and may be called upon to account for themselves in response to the kinds of critique to which the tourist enterprise as a whole has been subjected. It will be useful here to set out briefly some of the critical issues, conceptual tropes, and theoretical frameworks that will serve as useful points of reference for my closer analysis of the Village Harmony phenomenon and other musical journeys and encounters that will concern us later in this chapter.

The tourist experience has been extensively theorised following Dean MacCannell's seminal study *The Tourist: A New Theory of the Leisure Class* (1976). MacCannell saw the modern tourist as "one of the best models available for modern-man-in-general", driven by an unending quest for authenticity that is thought to lie "elsewhere: in other historical periods and other cultures, in purer, simpler lifestyles" (1976: 1, 3). This yearning for other times and places is inevitably overshadowed by what Renato Rosaldo (1989) has termed "imperialist nostalgia", whereby the civilised world (or the modern age) mourns the disappearance of what it has helped to destroy. In similar vein, tourism has been heavily critiqued as "a replaying of the colonial encounter" (Abram 1997: 32), as the privileged inhabitants of the developed world seek pleasure and enrichment in exotic but less developed regions, in a largely one-way traffic rooted in unequal power relations in which the dividing line between exploration and exploitation is negligible. In this way, the cycle of loss and degradation continues. Mass tourism in particular is tainted (to borrow Simone Abram and Jacqueline Waldren's words) "with the imagery of a totalising modernity that tarnishes all it touches, destroying 'authentic cultures' and polluting 'earthly paradises', so that it has become a truism to state that tourism destroys the very object of its desire" (1997: 1).

In less loaded terms, tourism (not unlike festival culture) may be seen as a form of escape, whether from the superficiality and alienation of the modern world, domestic responsibilities and the grind of the working week, or merely the British weather.[3] It is this trope that lies behind Nelson Graburn's (1978) conception of the touristic undertaking as a "sacred journey", or what Jeremy Boissevain glosses as "a ludic interlude that revitalizes the traveller, enabling him to cope again with the strictures and structures of everyday life" (1996: 2). Of particular interest to us here is the notion that travel offers an escape from **(p.260)** the humdrum, day-to-day self, the journey holding the promise of discovering one's "true" identity in the context of novel experiences of heightened intensity. The tourist's journey, not unlike performance, becomes another liminal, potentially transformative space in which the traveller adopts "a new, temporary identity that necessarily incorporates some elements that are the opposite of the habitual personality and behaviour" (Boissevain 1996: 4). The notion of an authentic experience may, then, rest in a sense of coming into contact both with a "real" world and with one's "real" self (Wang 2000). Meanwhile, notions of the sacred recur in connection with Max Weber's thesis that rational thought drives out the sacred and the symbolic, the magical and the mystical, only to leave the world disenchanted. Travel in this context becomes a quest for re-enchantment.

Another classic of tourism literature is John Urry's *The Tourist Gaze* (1990), whose central theme is the way in which the tourist's attention is directed away from the ordinary, routine aspects of real people's lives to specially designated sights and landmarks, such as symbolic buildings and features of the landscape.

Urry's protagonist, encountered again in his later work *Consuming Places*, is a "post-tourist" who "finds pleasure in the multitude of games that can be played and knows that there is no authentic tourist experience" (1995: 140). The post-tourist is happy to consume signs and simulations in destinations that increasingly resemble theme parks more than real places (there are clear echoes here of the notions of hyperreality and simulacra, associated respectively with Umberto Eco and Jean Baudrillard).

It was partly in response to the twin processes of Disneyfication and homogenisation that various forms of alternative tourism began in appear from the 1980s onward, with labels that included cultural tourism, ethnic tourism (usually focused on "exotic" peoples), ecotourism, green tourism, sustainable tourism, intelligent tourism, ethical tourism, and, more recently, extreme tourism, shock tourism, and dark tourism (respectively, engaging in dangerous activities akin to "extreme sport", travelling to places known to be dangerous and violent, or visiting sites of tragedy and disaster). Compared with the package tourist in search of little more than sun, sea, and sand, and unlikely to stray too far from the safety of the resort, the new brand of tourist was more independent, more adventurous, open to new experiences, usually more environmentally conscious, and often eager to make genuine contact with local people and cultures. Those undertaking this kind of journey often preferred the appellation "traveller" as a way of distinguishing themselves from the more common charter tourist. Just as Peter Gabriel, in his vision for WOMAD, sought to close the gap between the artists and the audience, so too do many alternative tourism enterprises aspire to close the gap between residents and visitors, in part by placing the visitor in a position of active participation rather than passive consumption. This kind of low-level, off-the-beaten-track tourism is also more beneficial to local economies since **(p.261)** visitors are more likely to stay in private rooms or family-owned apartments, eat at family-run restaurants, drink at local bars, and support local environmental causes.

The dynamics that come into play between hosts and guests and the strategies that hosts employ to keep tourists in their place and protect at least some aspects of their lives from commoditisation have been another significant focus of attention for anthropologists of tourism. MacCannell (1973) introduced the notion of "staged authenticity" in the sense of a performance of supposedly authentic village life laid on specially for tourists in the "front" regions while local residents lived out their private lives in the "back" regions to which tourists were not normally granted access.[4] Numerous case studies have gone on to show that, far from being helpless victims of postcolonial exploitation, hosts have found ways of turning tourism to their own advantage; and even in the absence of such proactive, strategic planning, arguments have been made for the potential of the tourist encounter to lead to the cultural enrichment, rather than degradation, of the host community. Part of the objective of the contributors to the volume *Tourists and Tourism: Identifying with People and*

Places, for example, was to show how tourism “can provide the setting for people [in the host community] to reconsider how they identify themselves, and how they relate to the rest of the world” (Abram and Waldren 1997: 10). Here, Simone Abram argues that the way in which symbols of the past are “sold” to tourists may, in fact, be “an opportunity for the expression of identity”, enabling people “to define and express a continuity that they wish to maintain between the past and the future”. Tourists may also “enhance local social activity by providing the audience required to frame a performance, and a background against which local identity can be reflected upon” (Abram 1997: 46). In another of the volume’s case studies, Niels Sampath suggests that: “In the end, it may be the foreign or tourist market that preserves the art of steel pan production and tuning [...], and which injects the cash for steel pan competitions in Trinidad” (1997: 161).

In his introduction to *Coping with Tourists: European Reactions to Mass Tourism*, Jeremy Boissevain expounds in a similar spirit on tourism’s potential to promote “self-awareness, pride, self-confidence and solidarity among those being visited”, especially in cases where the host community is remote or otherwise peripheral (1996: 6). In many places, he argues, tourist interest and the self-reflection that this has prompted have led to the revitalisation of traditional crafts and local festivities. Museums and heritage parks established for tourists have also become popular with local residents, who have thereby learnt more about their own traditions. In some cases, too, “the importance of tourist attention and revenue has given marginal host communities the confidence and leverage to bargain for more rights from superior authorities” (7). Perhaps giving most pause for thought are indications that the development of tourism has reduced if not halted depopulation in some regions, such as the Greek island of Skyros. In all these examples, there are both losses and gains. **(p.262)**

It is, perhaps, no coincidence that much of this theoretical groundwork lent itself to such extensive application and elaboration in the 1990s—just as the seeds of the initiatives that concern us here were beginning to bear fruit. In the new millennium, anthropologists and others have continued to pursue research into the politics and economics of cultural tourism in emerging as well as established destinations, with particular reference to the challenge of balancing local and global forces in an increasingly globalised (or globalising) world (see e.g. Smith and Robinson 2006; Smith 2009; Timothy 2011). The rapid international proliferation of festivals, with their celebratory dimension and their multiple functions of reviving or enshrining heritage, empowering local communities, and creating a space for meaningful cross-cultural encounter in the present, has been one of the most significant developments of more recent times, and this, too, has given rise to a growing body of new literature (see e.g. Picard and Robinson 2006; Gibson and Connell 2011). Meanwhile, the central tropes formulated in the early tourism classics continue to have currency. MacCannell’s

notion of “staged authenticity”, for example, resonates behind the new paths beaten in works such as *Tourism Mobilities* (Sheller and Urry 2004), where tourist destinations are treated as not only “places to play” but also “places in play” which “‘move’ as they are put into play in relation to other places” and are themselves always changing (back cover). Questions of authenticity, performativity, and tourism as pilgrimage resurface in Chris Gibson and John Connell’s *Music and Tourism: On the Road Again* (2005). Alain de Botton, appealing to a more popular audience, takes up the tropes of travel as healing and transformation when he writes of travel playing a vital role in “cementing important inner transitions” and, more specifically, of “places which by virtue of their remoteness, solitude, beauty or cultural richness retain an ability to salve the wounded parts of us” (2012: 273).

Travel, then, offers yet another means of experimenting with alternative ways of being-in-the-world and finding *communitas*. How far this particular dimension of the tourist experience might be seen to rest on utopian or imagined foundations is in many ways beside the point since, as Ning Wang points out, “If tourists think that they have achieved a sense of personal, interpersonal, and human-nature authenticity, then their feelings are ontologically real to themselves” (2000: 65). This does not, of course, mean that their impact on the places they visit lies outside the frame. We have also established, however, that the host community may play a far a more decisive part in the exchange than it is often credited with. The motivations, experiences, responses, and transformations that occur on both sides will therefore be part of my purview as I probe more deeply into the types of encounters that take place between singing travellers and their hosts. First, though, we return to the singing holidays that can be taken closer to home. **(p.263)**

A Village in a Field: The Unicorn Natural Voice Camp

The Unicorn Natural Voice Camp is, at the time of writing, one of three Unicorn camps that run consecutively on the same site in August. The venture was launched in 1987 by James Burgess, who describes himself as a Sufi leader, healer, and professional astrologer; he was also a co-founder of the Peace Through the Arts International Camp and the Oak Dragon Camps. James writes of how the camps that began to appear in the early 1980s as an offshoot of the latest wave of festivals and green gatherings had a different kind of identity: “They...were fundamentally different in their purpose, which was education and personal development, and in their approach, which required that people took an active part in what went on” (http://www.unicorncamps.com/spotlight_unicorn.php, acc. June 16, 2013). His vision was of a focused, sensitive, spiritual, creative, and family-friendly environment free of alcohol, drugs, dogs, amplified music, and sleepless nights. The Unicorn project began as a small annual camp centred on Dances of Universal Peace. The Natural Voice Camp, essentially the brainchild of Nickomo Clarke, was added in 1998. Nickomo relates how he and his family were already veteran campers when they

discovered the first music camps in the mid-1980s. Their attendance at the second Glastonbury music camp in 1986, where for the first time they found themselves camping not on a commercial campsite but in “a field of friendly people sharing a joy in music and dance and camping around real wood fires”, had the force of “an epiphany” (2007a: 21). As he began to teach at similar camps himself, and inspired in particular by the success of the South African song-and-dance package that he helped to develop with Colin Harrison, his vision of a camp devoted primarily to singing—as opposed to the voice work happening “on the back of dance” (interview 2007)—gradually took shape. When James Burgess invited him to become part of a new core group to re-envision the Unicorn venture, the dream finally became a reality and the first voice camp—a pilot four-day event—was held in 1998. This coincided with a time when the community choir scene was burgeoning and the voice camp rapidly grew to become an important annual meeting point for NVPN practitioners and choir members, while also welcoming those new to the natural voice world attracted by the promise of a different kind of holiday. (Of those who responded to the questionnaire I circulated following the 2007 camp, approximately three-quarters belonged to, or led, a community choir, and most had heard about the camp either through their choir or from a friend who had already attended. Although more than two-thirds of my respondants had attended with family or friends, a significant number had come alone.) The Unicorn Camp has inspired the establishment of other camps with a similar ethos, including the Earthsong Camp in Ireland (co-founded by John Bowker) and the German Unicorn Natural Voice Camp (founded by Raaja Fischer, a regular teacher at the British camps). **(p.264)**

The Unicorn Experience

A prominent tagline on the Unicorn Camps homepage reads “Alternative Family Camping Holidays—for Singers, Dancers and Magical Beings”; this is perhaps indicative of the extent to which these and similar camps, while retaining the “alternative” label, have moved out of what might once have been seen as a counter-cultural, “hippy” niche and closer to the mainstream (though in a different way to many of the festivals as described earlier). At the same time, the language used in the mission-statement-style description of the voice camp itself makes its connection with the natural voice movement abundantly clear:

> We are dedicated to finding the natural, authentic expressive voice in all of us. By really listening to ourselves and each other and by exploring our vocal potential we can experience empowerment, healing, devotion, meditation, affirmation, expression and fun.
>
> (http://www.unicorncamps.com/, acc. June 16, 2013)

“Community” is also emphasised here as “an essential part of the Unicorn Camps experience”.

The fact that the voice camp has maintained a stable base over several years—occupying the same site and employing the same teachers, for example—helps create the illusion of an established village.[5] While substantial numbers of new converts find their way to the event each summer, there is also a solid core of followers who have rarely missed a year and who might be regarded as the tribal elders. Regular attendees develop a relationship with the landscape and material layout of the camp, and with its conventions, norms, and etiquette. The structure of the week's activities also contains ritual elements that both mimic the patterns of activity in an imagined village and reinforce the desired sense of community. Each morning there is an hour-long gathering in the main marquee that everyone is encouraged to attend to find out more about the programme for the day and be party to any important announcements. For the rest of the day, individuals follow their own path though a choice of activities, interspersed with domestic tasks, with the culture of cooking and sharing meals in smaller groups helping to nurture a sense of family. The whole camp comes together again for the main evening events, which often have a celebratory dimension. Wednesday is traditionally market day, when the largest marquee is overflowing with all manner of items that attendees have brought to sell: hand-knitted jumpers, felt hats, sheepskins, musical instruments, pottery, woodwork, essential oils, candles, songbooks, and CDs. Towards the end of the week, there is an evening of exuberant drumming and dancing around a large central fire, and on the last night of camp, those who have attended the main workshops that have run throughout the week have the opportunity to perform their songs for the rest of the camp. **(p.265)**

Care is taken to cultivate a climate of respect—for one fellow's campers, for the environment, and for the residents of the nearby village. All attendees are required to sign up to the camp rules that are reproduced on their ticket and must agree to abide by those rules for the duration of their stay. These include not bringing alcohol or illegal drugs onto the site, not playing amplified music or using noisy electronic devices, using mobile phones only (if at all) away from the camping area, and not making noise that might disturb others between the hours of 11 p.m. and 8 a.m. Each person is allocated a few hours of "karma yoga", joining the site crew or area teams to help with the day-to-day maintenance and smooth running of the camp (e.g., food preparation, toilet cleaning, or lantern lighting). Attending the camp, then, involves a commitment to more than just the singing and may require individual freedoms to be sacrificed in the interests of the greater good. At the same time, personal development is encouraged and, in the view of the camp organisers, is facilitated by the clarity that results from interacting with others in a more mindful way.

The camp may have its utopian side but it is also firmly grounded in practicalities and a sense of moral accountability. Subscribing to the ethos of treading lightly on the earth and living simply on the land, it is organised in such a way that campers can be as self-sufficient as possible and will not have to

leave the site once the camp is established. Lift-sharing is encouraged and all waste is recycled. In recognition of the energy use and carbon emission that is nonetheless entailed in setting up the camp as well as travelling to and from the site, substantial donations are made to a tree-planting project at the Timbaktu Collective in India. Raising funds for WaterAid—framed as a way to help improve the lives of at least some of the people whose songs are sung and celebrated at the camp—has also become a tradition; through a lively auction and other activities that take place during the week, a sum in excess of £5,000 is raised each year purely from the pockets of those attending the camp.

The Unicorn Repertoire

The material encountered at the camp ranges from short and relatively simple songs suited to early morning warm-ups or the kind of communal evening session depicted in my opening vignette to far more elaborate arrangements that require dedicated teaching and are built up progressively through the week. The editions of the *Unicorn Natural Voice Camp Songbook* that have been produced from time to time feature favourites taught at each year's camp. Volumes 1 to 3, which cover the years 1998 to 2006, reveal some interesting trends (with the caveat that the songs presented will vary to some extent according to the combination of teachers featured on the programme in any given year). Volume 1 is notable for including a predominance of African songs—a total **(p.266)** of eighteen, including several from South Africa—together with four gospel songs (in arrangements by Tony Backhouse and Nick Prater), three Native American chants, a Prana chant, a Maori song, a song from the Pacific Islands, a song from the Caribbean, a peace song from Korea, an old French song, a Russian church song, two arrangements of popular songs by Nickomo, and seven original compositions by NVPN members. Volume 2 features African songs and original compositions in equal number—nine of each—plus two spirituals, five gospel-style songs, a barbershop song, a Bulgarian song, a Macedonian song, two Irish songs, a Hawaiian *hula* song, and four rounds. A similar spread appears in volume 3, with ten African songs, nine new compositions, four gospel songs, two Georgian songs, a Taizé-style chant in Latin, and one song each from the Georgia Sea Islands, the Cook Islands, the Torres Strait Islands, Taiwan, Israel, Romania, and Croatia.

The repertoire represented here includes a substantial number of quick-and-easy songs that are heard year after year around the evening campfires. These songs will not necessarily find their way into a more formal performance or onto a choir's CD, but they have nonetheless become part of a common, nationwide repertoire. Workshops provide the opportunity to concentrate on more complex pieces, with some taking the form of half-day sessions spread over three or four consecutive days alongside one-off "drop-ins". Here the influence of individual workshop leaders may be more obvious, especially in cases where they are teaching their own compositions or arrangements. A number of practitioners and choir directors already encountered in this book feature in the roll call of

the camp’s established teachers: these include John Bowker, Ali Burns, Pauline Down, Jules Gibb, Dee Jarlett, Bruce Knight, Kirsty Martin, Kate O’Connell, Una May Olomolaiye, Nick Prater, Roxane Smith, and Rowena Whitehead.

It in interesting to consider how the chosen songs might chime with the camp’s ethos and contribute, at a deeper level, to the Unicorn experience. In their musical style and structure, the songs from the world’s oral traditions that typically feature on the programme lend themselves to the establishment of a cohesive singing community in ways that have already been established. In the case of popular songs and chants in the English language, the sentiments embodied in the lyrics often speak to themes of togetherness, solidarity, peace, and harmony. Songs that are explicitly religious (such as gospel or shape note songs) or that have associations with sociopolitical movements (such as civil rights or anti-apartheid songs) have also evolved as songs made for binding communities together and may therefore hold some meaning on this count even for those who do not necessarily feel a personal affinity with their subject matter. Particular features of songs may also function at more than one level. For mass collective singing, preference will understandably be given to songs with relatively few words and repetitive musical structures for the pragmatic reason that what is required in this situation is songs that can **(p.267)** be learnt quickly and effectively by a group of singers of mixed experience, sometimes working in semi-darkness. At another level, sustained repetition, together with the phenomenon of switching onto automatic pilot that verbal minimalism allows, helps create a numinous or transcendent experience which, in turn, increases the sense of bonding and what is referred to in some kinds of holistic therapies or spiritual practices as “opening the heart”.

Among the more focused workshops, those offered by Dee Jarlett and Ali Orbaum (co-directors of Bristol’s Gasworks Choir) emerge as perennial favourites. These typically feature Dee and Ali’s lively arrangements of British and American popular songs from the 1960s onwards. Here, the community connection resides above all in the fact that these songs may be seen as part of a shared heritage that, to a greater extent than classical music, cuts across barriers of class and education. In addition, many have anthemic qualities that evoke a sense of solidarity and score high on the feel-good factor. Some embody sentiments that may also resonate with the personal experience of individual singers. The enduring popularity of Dee’s arrangement of Labi Siffre’s anti-apartheid anthem “Something Inside So Strong”, for instance, must owe something to the fortuitous inclusion of the line “The more you refuse to hear my voice the louder I will sing”. Some contemporary songs in the folk idiom appeal for similar reasons, among the most popular being “Unison in Harmony” by close harmony group Coope Boyes & Simpson—another triumphantly anthemic song that includes the resonant line “What we sing is what we are”, together

with the hopeful anticipation: “Nations shall sing unto nations/Until nations cease to be”.

The camps have also served as a launch pad for new bodies of work by NVPN members, including Ali Burns, Kirsty Martin, and Helen Yeomans. Of particular interest to us here is Nickomo’s Harmonic Temple, an ever-expanding collection of chants consisting of short, mantra-like texts from different spiritual traditions set to music and arranged in four-part harmony. As described in chapter 3, in the late 1980s and early 1990s Nickomo and his partner, Rasullah, had hosted the weekly sessions of the Bristol Chanting Group, in whose repertoire Prana and Taizé chants featured prominently. Nickomo talks of how, when he started leading workshops at Dance Camp Wales, he quickly realised that “there was a need for stuff that was *like* Taizé” but without being tied to the Christian faith (interview 2007). This prompted him to start creating simple four-part chants that used texts from different religious and spiritual paths. Sources for the material from the two original tapes, *Harmonic Temple* (1995) and *Harmonic Temple Volume 2* (1996), later brought together in the *Ateh Malkuth* CD compilation, are listed as Christian, Jewish, Qabbalist, Sufi/Islamic, Hindu, Buddhist, Inuit, Druid, Pagan, and the *Carmina Gadelica* (a collection of prayers, charms, incantations, and blessings from Scotland’s Gaelic-speaking highlands and islands).[6] An hour-long Harmonic Temple session scheduled before the morning gathering has long been a feature of the camp and is one component on which many **(p.268)** regulars will declare themselves to be “hooked”: when I asked participants in the 2007 voice camp what the highpoints had been for them, the daily Harmonic Temple sessions featured prominently.

Nickomo’s elaboration of the rationale behind the Harmonic Temple initiative is instructive in relation to my broader analysis of the camp ethos. In the preface to *Deep Peace* he writes:

> The Harmonic Temple shows a lot of respect for the truths and insights to be found in religious traditions, but not a lot for organized religion as such! I believe that if we view the collective spiritual wisdom of the planet as exactly that—our collective inheritance, we can work with whatever wisdom resonates with the deepest level of our being without having to buy into any particular package deal.
>
> (Clarke 2007b: n.p.)

He goes on to describe himself as “a bit of a mantra junkie”, always on the lookout for new mantras that “hit the spot”. Like the creators of the Taizé chants (see chapter 5), he speaks of how “using languages [such as Sanskrit and Latin] that are different from the ones in which we conduct our daily business sets them apart as special and magical”. Nickomo’s choice of language here is revealing, with his use of terms like “package deal” and the notion of the songs

marking a “special” and “magical” place set apart from “our daily business” resonating in obvious ways with the tropes of tourism reviewed earlier in this chapter. The juxtaposition of “collective inheritance” and “buying into a deal” also chimes with the ethos of the natural voice movement as a whole and is suggestive of further oppositions such as autonomy versus subservience to institutional authority, and self-sufficiency versus consumerism. The appeal to “respect” for the “truths and insights” to be found beyond our own cultural horizons is clearly indicative of a cosmopolitan positioning, while the quest for mantras that “hit the spot” reflects an acute awareness of the power of words, as well as music, to embody shared sentiment and meaning and act as a route to attaining “flow”.

For participants, the repetition of short segments of material becomes part of a process akin to spiritual practice, with the deepening relationship that an individual thereby experiences to both the music and his or her fellow singers also facilitating a sense of *communitas*. In Nickomo’s own words:

> It’s all based around actually entering the sound physically and being able to explore it.…You know, you learn lots of songs but sometimes you just don’t have that freedom to get in the middle of a chord and just really feel what it is, and the magic of it. And Harmonic Temple is very much about that. It’s not about end product; it’s about experience…and you’re not singing it *to* anybody, you’re singing it to the whole group and you’re exploring it, and I continue to find that a very rewarding thing to do.
>
> (Clarke interview 2007)

(p.269)

Mantra-based songs, Nickomo observes elsewhere, also travel well: “As they don’t usually have many words they are not any more difficult to teach to a group for whom English is not the native tongue” (Clarke 2007b: n.p.). This adds further to the inclusivity of the experience.

Nickomo’s reference to “entering the sound physically” invites us to consider Harmonic Temple as acoustic architecture as well as spiritual endeavour. As he explains in the preface to *Ateh Malkuth*, “The phrase ‘Harmonic Temple’ is an attempt to describe the phenomenon which occurs when these chants are sung, of a sacred space created by the sound of vocal harmony” (Clarke 2002: 1).[7] Interestingly, several of my questionnaire respondents commented (without any prompting) on their experience of singing broadly “spiritual” songs with reference to (or in opposition to) the idea of a church. One, for example, responded as follows to my question “Do you find yourself attracted to the songs of a particular culture?”

> I like African best and also simple spiritual songs—Taizé and the like that take me to a blissful place. Singing for me is a way to be in Spirit, in Joy, to be blissed out. It is about experiencing the oneness with others, with everything. I am not into the highly technical or musically challenging. It is more like “going to church” for me.
>
> (Anon., Unicorn questionnaire 2007)

In many ways, the daily Harmonic Temple sessions function as Unicorn’s church, and the profound and often “magical” atmosphere they create is a fundamental aspect of the Unicorn experience for those who attend them. In it interesting in this regard to relate the Unicorn endeavour to ideas presented by Alain de Botton in his entertaining and edifying book *Religion for Atheists* (which on its publication in 2012 rapidly attained best-seller status). Here, de Botton argues for the need to separate the more life-enriching ideals and rituals from the religious institutions to which we may no longer subscribe, reclaiming them for our own use. Foremost among these are notions of community and education (under which he includes “spiritual exercises”). He also writes of his vision for a new generation of secular temples, taking many different forms, which would “function as reminders of our hopes” and “educate and rebalance our souls” (2012: 275).[8]

Each new set of Harmonic Temple chants is made available in a songbook (with musical scores, explanations of the song texts, teaching tips, and ideas for simple accompanying movements), a performance CD (with the songs performed by a massed choir), and a workdisc (with the parts demonstrated separately). All these items are available for purchase on market day, as are other songbooks and teaching CDs compiled by different workshop leaders. Combined with the CD of camp highlights that is produced (for campers only) shortly after the event, this allows attendees to take a more concrete piece of the camp experience home with them and aids the further dissemination of the **(p.270)** material.[9] Between camps, the experience is also kept alive through the quarterly podcasts (produced by Nickomo) that offer a compilation of recordings made at the camp, interspersed with short interviews with workshop leaders.[10]

The Unicorn Community

It is, presumably, the prevalence of gospel and other religious-sounding songs and the commitment to the annual church concert, combined with the casual and at times unorthodox style of dress adopted by the campers (not unreasonably, given that they are in holiday mode), which led to Unicorn once being described in the local parish newsletter as “a Christian organisation that provides holidays for deprived adults and children”. In reality, practising Christians are very much in the minority (and quite possibly outnumbered by converts to Sufism or Buddhism and those who identify with a broadly Celtic neo-pagan orientation); and while a proportion of those who frequent the camps

may indeed have rejected the nine-to-five (not to mention 24/7), competitive urban rat-race, many more have one foot firmly in the middle-class professional world, albeit with an above-average proportion of charity workers and therapists. Occupations given by those who responded to my 2007 questionnaire included college lecturer, English for Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL) tutor, teacher, artist, fine arts student, performing arts practitioner, actress, writer, journalist, nurse, hospital Information Technology (IT) training manager, therapist, psychotherapist, yoga teacher, shiatsu practitioner, charity manager, and support worker. Among their declared interests and pastimes (apart from singing) were peace demonstrations, cycling campaigns, environmental group, sustainability group, community allotment, Local Exchange Trading Systems (LETS) group, charity volunteer, local gay network, personal development group, yoga, tai chi, meditation, Quakers, community theatre group, circle dance, drumming, ice hockey, University of the Third Age, Amnesty International, Greenpeace, the National Trust, and the Royal Horticultural Society. From these lists interesting lifestyle choices begin to emerge. There is a strong tendency for attendees to be involved in the caring professions, education, or the arts, and to devote leisure time to charitable, political, or community causes, on the one hand, and personal development and wellbeing, on the other.

Replies to my question about other camps the respondent and his or her family may have attended were also revealing. A high proportion of respondents reported regular attendance at camps such as Dance Camp Wales and Peace Through the Arts (the first and second highest number of mentions), Dance Camp East and Oak Dragon Camps (with several mentions each), Sacred Arts, Whitsun Voice Camp, Glastonbury Dance Camp, Dancing Circles Camp, Rainbow Circle, One World Camp, Tribe of Doris, African Arts Village, Drum Camp, Heartsound, Singing Spirit, Spirit Horse, Voices Coming Together, **(p.271)** and residential singing breaks at Cae Mabon (North Wales) and Holycombe (Warwickshire). Again, this investment of both leisure time and financial resources is indicative of significant lifestyle choices, while the incidence of designations relating to peace, spirit, heart, and the sacred, alongside more straightforward references to dancing, drumming, singing, and the arts, is noteworthy. Some respondents also listed other camps or festivals that they had attended but not enjoyed for reasons including alcohol and drug abuse, litter, and noise.

The question “What do you (and other members of your family) most like about the camp?” yielded more discursive answers that mapped in interesting ways onto the overall ethos and inspiration behind the Unicorn venture as described earlier. Almost all responses included the word “community”, with the pleasures of communal cooking and being outdoors also receiving several mentions alongside references to relaxation, friendship, and, of course, singing. Representative responses included the following:

• The Community. The beautiful harmonic singing. The camping circles and making new friends. The communal eating and singing round the campfire. The summer outdoors in England. Sitting lightly on the land.

• Re-gathering of the tribe: sense of community and shared endeavour, being outdoors, living at a more simple level than usual, the invigoration of singing each day, the incredible highs of harmony and improvisation when it clicks.

• I think the whole camp scene is spreading out of a need in each of us, to return to our connection with the land, our community with each other, need for co-habitation, co-cooking, being outside, respectful relationships and our innate need for music—particularly singing and dancing.

• I love the sense of community, camping on the land and cooking and eating together, the simplicity of life, the wonderful regard for nature and the camping environment and of course, the range of singing on offer. The fact that things happen spontaneously: a jamming session here, and a bit of a sing there, crazy stuff in the cabaret, performance night: the way that people dream up little shows and collaborate with each other to make them happen.

• The *sharing* of *all* aspects of camp life; being outdoors 24 hours a day; Harmonic Temple; time to relate to likeminded people; all of it!!!

One respondent focused on the “easy-going, accepting, open-hearted element” and the “chance to relax and let go of city stresses”. Others referred to the way in which the camp was “good at bringing out the best in people”, revealing a “wealth of talent in ordinary people” and offering the “opportunity to express self in many different ways”. One said quite simply “belonging”. Parents also emphasised “children’s autonomy” and their appreciation of the **(p.272)** way in which the camp provided a “safe space to be ‘free range children’”, with one adding: “I can say that as soon as Voice Camp is over, my two sons start counting the days till the next one comes round!”

The sense of bonding to which shared activities of different orders give rise may be related more specifically to theories about the power of music—understood here as a social activity and communal experience—to induce a phenomenon that Oliver Sacks envisions as “an actual binding or ‘marriage’ of nervous systems, a ‘neurogamy’” (2008: 266). We might also reflect further on the associations made by many of my respondents and interviewees between collective singing and spiritual enrichment or a quasi-religious experience. Sacks goes on to suggest that “there is evidence that religious practices began with communal chanting and dancing, often of an ecstatic kind and, not infrequently, culminating in states of trance” (267). The use of singing and dancing as a path to ecstasy, as well as a natural means of maintaining

individual and societal health, is also central to Barbara Ehrenreich's treatise on collective joy. Ehrenreich draws on Émile Durkheim's concept of "collective effervescence", a term he coined to denote "the ritually induced passion or ecstasy that cements social bonds" which he believed formed the basis of religion (Ehrenreich 2007: 2–3). She brings this into dialogue with Victor Turner's concept of *communitas*, defined by Turner as "a possible collective state achieved through rituals where all personal differences of class, status, age, gender, and other personal distinctions are stripped away allowing people to temporarily merge through their basic humanity" (Turner 1995: 18). Ehrenreich sees the notions of collective effervescence and *communitas* as each, in its own way, reaching towards "some conception of love that serves to knit people together in groups larger than two" (qualified by the observation that "there is no word for the love—or force or need—that leads individuals to seek ecstatic merger with the group"; Ehrenreich 2007: 14).

The Unicorn camp, then, offers a classic embodiment of festivity as a state or space that allows us to step (as Ehrenreich puts it) into "a brief utopia defined by egalitarianism, creativity, and mutual love" (253) and reclaim "our distinctively human heritage as creatures who can generate their own ecstatic pleasures out of music, color, feasting, and dance" (260). The "thrill of the group deliberately united in joy and exaltation" (16) may have been relegated to the margins in the modern age, but at Unicorn and camps of a similar ilk it appears to have risen, Phoenix-like, from the ashes. That the camp is able to function in this way relates not only to the kinds of activities on offer and the carefully nurtured climate of mutual respect and empowerment, but also to its relatively small size, which is another factor that sets it apart it from the majority of festivals. Ehrenreich notes specifically that "ecstatic rituals and festivities seem to have evolved to bind people in groups of a few hundred at a time—a group size at which it is possible for each participant to hear the same (unamplified) music and see all the other participants at once" (250). The fact **(p.273)** that, at Unicorn, everyone on site can fit into the main marquee at the same time and can see and hear one another is crucial to the sense of intimacy or "belonging" felt by participants.

Sociologist Randall Collins also draws on Durkheim's notion of collective effervescence in developing his model of what he terms "interaction ritual chains".[11] Collins places particular emphasis on the importance of the emotional energy that is generated by ritual, identifying this as "the social emotion par excellence" (2004: xii). Collective (physical) movements focus the attention, which in turn enhances the expression of shared emotion, leading to a state of heightened intersubjectivity (35). He explains the chain process as follows:

> Where mutual focus and entrainment become intense, self-reinforcing feedback processes generate moments of compelling emotional experience. These in turn become motivational magnets and moments of

> cultural significance, experiences where culture is created, denigrated, or reinforced.
>
> (Collins 2004: xii)

This helps elucidate both the affective attachment to the camp as a whole (or rather, to the community that it represents) and also the nature of the profound emotional responses to discrete components such as the Harmonic Temple sessions.

Choirs on the Move

More and more often, whole choirs (or substantial proportions of them) are taking to the road. Sometimes they travel to join forces with other choirs at UK-based events like Sing for Water, Raise Your Banners, the National Street Choir Festival, or one of the many regional "big sings" or community choir conventions that grow in size and popularity each year. At other times they may head for a private retreat, which offers an opportunity for choir members to get to know one another better as well as polish and augment their repertoire away from day-to-day distractions. As mentioned in chapter 7, members of the Forres Big Choir in Scotland have made several trips of this kind to the island of Iona. Islands are also a location of choice for singing holidays led by NVPN practitioners which are advertised more widely via the natural voice network. The Forres choir's co-leaders Kate O'Connell and Bill Henderson, for example, lead an additional singing week each year on the island of Eigg in the Hebrides; David Burbidge organises annual singing holidays to Jura, another Hebridean island; and Jane Read takes groups to Bardsey Island (Ynys Enlli) off the coast of North Wales. Set apart from the mainland-cum-mainstream with the journey having an aura of adventure, islands offer the archetypal opportunity to "get away from it all" to a place where life often seems to move **(p.274)** at a slower pace and the spirit of the past may still be tangible in the form of prehistoric remains and ancient monuments. Jura, for instance, boasts Iron Age forts, burial grounds, and standing stones. Iona and Bardsey were both important centres of the ancient Celtic church and continue to be sites of pilgrimage.[12] Very small islands with limited accommodation offer the possibility of almost exclusive occupation, while return visits allow for more than a passing acquaintance with the few permanent residents.

NVPN member Candy Verney has also taken groups to Bardsey, as well as Orkney and Skye, following on from earlier singing journeys to the Himalayas that began when she and some of her choir members accompanied a group of A level students studying Buddhism and Hinduism on a trip organised by their teacher (and choir member), Sue Glanville. Reflecting on this first trip, Candy described how, after a long day of trekking, the group would sit around the fire and sing together. On the very last night, perched on a promontory at 10,000 feet, they persuaded the sherpas to join them. As they sang their songs to one

other, “there wasn’t a dry eye…it was so special because we were exchanging our cultures in their landscape” (Verney interview 2008). This experience inspired the idea of “journeying”, which became the name of the company that Candy and Sue subsequently set up and through which they organised a series of singing holidays. The vision, as Candy explains it, was of “trips where through the outward journey you go inward—so there is a personal development side to what we do and the whole point is to connect more deeply to the landscape…and more with our fellow travellers and with ourselves”. She also uses the image of the pilgrimage, referring to an insight that had come to her on the most recent trip:

> I realised that we were on a pilgrimage because the process of walking, and getting to know each other and deepening our connection and opening out to each other—and then singing facilitates all those things…You can’t stay still if you go on a walk and I think that’s what pilgrimage is probably about. It shifts you, it changes you, and you go on an inner and an outer journey both at the same time, so that’s what I found really interesting and exciting.
>
> (Verney interview 2008)

The journey itself, then, becomes a vehicle for transformation, and the experience of being changed in this way is all the more powerful for being shared with others. The songs that are learnt along the way become part of the process by which the journey is embodied and archived and, when they are later re-sung, serve to reinforce this reconfigured subjectivity as well as keeping the memory alive at a more mundane level.[13]

Direct one-to-one exchanges between British choirs and choirs overseas are also increasing. These initiatives may be seen to conform to the friendship model, where mutual support, appreciation, and cooperation, rather than competition, are the guiding principles, and where the sharing of musical **(p.275)** repertoires is a natural part of the undertaking. Informal social singing, as well as shared concerts and the exchange of songs, is an important feature of such journeys. Present space allows me to make only brief mention of two examples. The association between David Burbidge’s choirs in the Lake District and singers from Zreče in northeast Slovenia came about through a town-twinning scheme after the Cumbrian town of Sedbergh was the subject of a BBC2 television series, *The Town that Wants a Twin* (2005), and chose (following visits by four contenders) the town of Zreče. Regular visits are made back and forth between the two towns, and the visitors join in singing the songs of their hosts as they take part in local traditions, such as carolling at Christmas time. David’s new Slovenian friends, far from cringing as some of his choir members had feared, were moved to tears when they heard their songs being sung in England. From the Slovene point of view, as David explains it, it is above all their folk

songs that have held them together and defined them as a nation through centuries of subjugation in which they have always been “part of somewhere else”, “and so when we sing them it’s like an enormous sense of respect to them” (interview 2007). Interestingly, David also writes:

> People often say there is not just one, but several Sedberghs—referring to the different cultures who live alongside each other in our town. My experience is that as we find bridges between the differences with our Slovene friends, we also find bridges between the differences within our own society.
>
> (http://sedberghinternational.blogspot.co.uk/2005/05/slovenian-singing-group-visits-sedbergh.html, acc. June 16, 2013)[14]

In the case of the relationship that has developed between Hilary Davies’s choirs in the Worcester area and the Diamond Choir from the township of Refilwe in South Africa (mentioned in chapter 3’s opening vignette), initial contact was made by a choir member who was visiting relatives in South Africa. Hilary and Barbara Curry, writing in the NVPN newsletter, describe the first visit made by a group of twenty-three British singers to South Africa in 2007 as “not so much a holiday, more an experience of a lifetime”. Their first day set the pace for what was to be an action-packed and heart-warming time: “The first 24 hours saw us visiting the local radio station, singing informally with a wonderfully energetic church youth choir, and ending up at a township party.” They also visited the Cullinan mine, local schools, and a hospice for HIV/AIDS sufferers, as well as other projects to which money raised in the United Kingdom by the British choirs and by the Diamond Choir on their earlier visit had already been donated. Again, any qualms about singing other people’s songs back to them were soon laid to rest. While audiences seemed uncertain as to how to respond to the European songs, especially when there was no movement involved, the South African songs were given a rapturous **(p.276)** reception: “We were greeted with dancing in the aisles, ululating and whooping.” Dee Jarlett’s arrangement of “Something Inside So Strong” also “brought the house down” every time they sang it. Concerts would typically end with the entire audience coming to the front and joining in, “finishing with what became our favourite farewell song, ‘Think of me, forget me not, remember me where ever you go’, complete with hugs and genuine affection between strangers” (Figure 8.5) (see web figure 08.12). Returning home “changed forever”, the British singers redoubled their efforts to raise funds for HIV/AIDS care and other community projects in Refilwe (Curry and Davies 2008: 13).[15]

The Village on the Move: Village Harmony's Overseas Camps

Figure 8.5 Members of the Diamond Choir (South Africa) and Rough Diamonds (United Kingdom) give an impromptu concert before bidding farewell at the airport. Johannesburg, April 2008.

Source: Courtesy of Steve Rigby.

As we learned in chapter 6, South Africa is also one of the destinations offered by the American organisation Village Harmony in its annual programme of overseas singing camps (sometimes designated "study-performance camps"). Other locations have included Ghana, Georgia, Ukraine, Russia, Bulgaria, Bosnia, the Republic of Macedonia, Corsica, Italy, Germany, Denmark, and Sweden, as well as the United Kingdom. Village Harmony describes itself as "an umbrella organization for a diverse range of choral, world music and harmony singing activities" (http://www.villageharmony.org/, acc. June 16, **(p.277)** 2013). Founded in 1988 by Larry Gordon, it began as an initiative that offered extracurricular singing activities for high school students in central Vermont. In 1995, Patty Cuyler joined as co-director and was instrumental in helping expand the organisation's overseas activities. Now constituted as a non-profit corporation, Village Harmony supports—in addition to the summer camp series that interests us here—a programme of community performing and touring ensembles that runs during the school year (including Boston Harmony World Music Chorus and the Onion River Chorus, both non-auditioned choirs), the semi-professional international touring ensemble Northern Harmony (whose concert programmes typically include songs taught at previous summer camps), and a range of other musical offerings, such as performances and residencies by foreign teachers and touring groups, including those with whom Village Harmony collaborates on its overseas camps (see web figure 08.12).

Despite their designation, the summer camps—which normally last between two and three weeks—do not literally take place under canvas. They begin with an intensive rehearsal week during which the twenty-five or so participants live communally in a gîte, hostel, or retreat centre and devote most of each day to learning the set of twenty or more songs that they will later offer in concert. While the main teachers will be from the country in which the camp is held, teachers of songs from other traditions may also be included in the team, together with Larry, Patty, or occasionally another member of the Village Harmony core team (see web figure 08.12). The group will thus build up a

repertoire featuring sets of songs from three or more musical cultures, some of which their audiences will be hearing for the first time, with gospel, shape note, or other songs from American folk traditions representing the home culture of the majority of those who form the Village Harmony ensemble. The group then travels around the country in minibuses, meeting with indigenous musicians, performing concerts (often with local choirs or dance groups), and staying with host families (see web figure 08.17). The organisers also allow time to visit places of interest so that camp particpants may learn about the history and culture of the country. Campers often speak of how much they cherish the opportunity to be privy to a way of life in which singing and dancing seem to play a more prominent part than they do at home. They are often struck by new understandings about the way in which music defines and strengthens communities or can play a crucial part in post-traumatic healing and reconciliation. They also value the insights they gain into other people's lives when they stay in the homes of local choir members. As one of my co-campers wrote of the Bosnian camp we were part of in 2008:

> Singing the music was wonderful and the reason for being there, but I think served sort of as the entrance into that world. That purpose provided us [with] a lot of opportunities that we would not have otherwise had.
>
> (Tom, Bosnia questionnaire 2008)

(p.278)

While the majority of campers typically come from North America, most tours include at least a few singers from the United Kingdom and other parts of Western Europe. Often, some of the participants will already know one another: they may sing in the same choir or have attended the same workshops at home, or they may have met on previous overseas tours. Many of the younger singers grew up with Village Harmony's youth camps and feel very much a part of the Village Harmony family, often viewing Patty and Larry as surrogate parent figures. There are, then, already several layers of community at work even before contact with the host community is made. As in the case of the Unicorn camps, references to "community" feature prominently in participants' statements about what Village Harmony represents to them. Catherine, for example, writes:

> It's all about community: the instantaneous and ad hoc community that develops when we come together as a small group to learn songs and languages together and in some cases travel together, *and* the global community that develops as a result of connecting different cultures through a common musical thread.
>
> (Catherine, Georgia questionnaire 2010)

As with the Unicorn camps, the familiarity of the overall structure and the shared ethos of each trip reinforce the campers' sense that they are taking part in an annual gathering of the tribe, albeit in this case a nomadic one. At the same time, each new tour will have its own unique flavour. This derives most obviously from the choice of repertoire and teachers, on the one hand, and the local culture and landscape, on the other. In the case of the tours that I have been part of, it was also interesting to see different themes coming to the forefront, especially in the more detailed experiential and phenomenological accounts that participants included in questionnaire responses and interviews. Equally interesting was the symbolic meaning attached to the different visits by our hosts. It is around these themes and interpretations, which in turn resonate in instructive ways with my earlier summary of key issues and tropes in the critical literature on tourism, that my present analysis is structured.

Village Harmony in Corsica

A central theme running through the feedback I gleaned from the Corsican camps with which I had some involvement in 2004 and 2008 was the challenge and excitement of coming to understand a profoundly different musical culture—different not simply in terms of musical style but, more fundamentally, in its conception of what constitutes a song and what it means to sing with others.[16] This required a radical reassessment of participants' relationship to **(p.279)** and assumptions about "music" as both entity and action. Many attendees were seasoned campers with a healthy repertory of songs from different parts of the world already under their belts. The Corsican songs, however, were an entirely new proposition. With their elastic rhythms and complex melismatic embellishment, Corsican songs do not exist in one fixed and definitive form. A performance always entails some degree of improvisation, while remaining within the bounds of an established musical grammar. Each interpretation is, moreover, expected to be subtly different as each new group of singers makes the song its own, rather than merely reproducing someone else's rendition. As the camp participants soon realised, what was required of them here was not simply to learn a set of songs but rather to learn a way of singing (including the related arts of ornamentation and improvisation) and of interacting with one's fellow singers; and this in turn cast a new light on the notion of authenticity, which in this case could not be equated with the accurate reproduction of an identifiable "original".

Working intensively in small groups with one voice to a part led to many eureka moments. Caitlin, for example, described how in one rehearsal with her trio:

> We were all making adjustments and trying to find the right sound and then it just suddenly happened. We locked in to each other and you could just tell it was all fitting just right. I almost stopped singing because I was so excited by the sound we were creating.

(Caitlin, Corsica questionnaire 2004)

Reflecting more broadly on the process of “getting to know how the song actually fits together…and in general how all three parts move to resolve the phrase”, Anthony commented: “This for me was a bodily thing, after a while it just ‘felt right’; it became something automatic…beyond intellect” (Corsica questionnaire 2004). Confirmation of the extent to which at least some of the singers succeeded in their quest to embody this new musical language and achieve a convincingly authentic performance came when a young male trio from the camp entered a *paghjella* singing competition at the wine festival in the village of Luri. Dan describes their initial reception when they turned up to register: “After many confused looks, hairy eyeballs, and active attempts to pretend we weren’t there, we were approached warily: ‘You’re not singing in French, are you? This is a Corsican singing competition.’” The trio went on to win third prize and later they were summoned to join more seasoned singers at the bar. “All in all,” Dan continues, “we felt we had done well for ourselves, and were giddy and proud.…It validated our work immensely to be able to throw ourselves into the fire and come out cooked, but not burnt” (Corsica questionnaire 2004).

A highlight for the group was a concert they gave in the village church in Talasani, where they were joined for their Corsican set by their hosts, the **(p. 280)** ensemble Tavagna. Dan notes that “we would sing our version of the song, then they would perform the same song. Eventually the pace quickened and they would just come join us in mid-song.” When the concert finally ended, they all moved outside where they carried on singing into the night. Dan continues:

> Tavagna closed with a breathtaking *lamentu*, [sung as] monody with all of us accompanying on a moving drone. I realized then that I couldn’t ever adequately articulate how special the whole experience was—who ever goes to a country to sing its traditional music in rural hamlets at midnight? We do, I guess.
>
> (Dan, Corsica questionnaire 2004)

Caitlin recalled the same moment as one of her highlights:

> I was sitting there just completely overwhelmed by how amazing it sounded and it hit me that I was experiencing something most people could never imagine. The beauty of the moment was so incredible, I almost felt like I didn’t deserve it.
>
> (Caitlin, Corsica questionnaire 2004)

Anthony used similar terms to describe the “specialness” of the entire visit:

> I felt like a very welcomed and even honoured guest, and with the songs that we had learned we had something to give back....I felt as if I was in a privileged position; being able to get closer to the Corsican spirit that only a Corsican can really know....I feel that we met Corsican people in a way that far surpasses any interaction that would have come about by being mere tourists. There was a real sharing and mutual respect that grew from the whole experience.
>
> (Anthony, Corsica questionnaire 2004)

Heidi, too, elaborated on the theme of making connections:

> Singing another culture's songs while immersed in that culture is also a powerful means of connecting with people. The Corsicans we met and sang for were obviously deeply moved and pleased that we respected and loved their music enough to come to their island and study it, and the Corsican singers who sang for us and with us connected with our group with enormous warmth and generosity. Singing together obviously creates harmony in more than one sense!
>
> (Heidi, Corsica questionnaire 2004)

For both parties, the impact of the encounter clearly transcended the purely musical. Dan recalls that, during the lengthy outdoor supper that followed another concert, a member of the Corsican group Barbara Fortuna

> made a toast...saying that we had really changed a lot of people's impressions of Americans and alerted them to the possibility that Corsica might not be such an **(p.281)** unknown quantity in the outside world. "The smashers of stereotypes" he called us.
>
> (Dan, Corsica questionnaire 2004)

In my Corsican feedback, the impact of "being there" was a prominent thread in its own right. Several participants offered surprisingly lengthy and evocative descriptions of their experience of place. Heidi, for example, wrote:

> I found it extremely meaningful to be studying Corsican music not only with one of the best Corsican singers in the world [Benedettu Sarrocchi], but *in Corsica*, surrounded by its open and generous people, its wonderful food and wine, its spectacular landscapes, villages of stone buildings, ancient churches, abandoned terraces and walls, plants and trees and gardens, the sea, the winds and the many scents they carried.
>
> (Heidi, Corsica questionnaire 2004)

The landscape and people made an equally profound impression on the youngest participant, Rosa (then aged fourteen), who also suggested that the impact of the experience would far outlast her physically “being there”:

> I woke up every morning knowing that I was exactly where I wanted to be. I loved how welcoming people were despite the language barrier and the American reputation….I loved the beaches, the donkeys, the wine festival, the old man who offered us cheese, the wind, the musicians we met, the group we became, the winding roads that you felt you were going to fall off at any second…and I *loved* the music. At other Village Harmony tours there have been a couple songs that stay in my head after tour is over. But with Corsica they’re all still there, and I feel like they’re going to stay there forever and everything I do is going to be somehow affected by this music that is always flowing in my mind….I think that because of this experience, I’m going to be a happier person.
>
> (Rosa, Corsica questionnaire 2004)

Village Harmony in Bosnia

The “being there” theme took on a more pointed and sobering guise in the context of the Bosnian camp I attended in 2008, little more than a decade after the formal end of the war whose legacy was still all too apparent. This camp was led by Village Harmony veteran Mary Cay Brass, whose personal Balkan journey had begun when, at the age of nine, she was recruited into the dance troop of her Croatian neighbours in Minnesota. She went on to study ethnomusicology and, in the mid-1970s, spent two years in the former Yugoslavia on a Fulbright scholarship. A number of other participants had pre-existing connections with Bosnia, and some were also competent in the language. One had, like Mary Cay, lived there during the 1970s, first on a **(p.282)** Junior Year Abroad and a few years later on a Fulbright. Two of the older men (now retired) had spent time in former Yugoslavia as young men in connection with the Experiment in International Living, an organisation that runs home-stay and activity programmes for American youth in various countries around the world. Others had grandparents who had migrated to America from the Balkans or other parts of Eastern Europe and felt drawn to the region on that count.

Our party on this occasion included several members of the choirs led by Mary Cay in Vermont and Massachusetts. We were routinely introduced as an American choir for the purposes of this trip, so a Swiss woman and I—the only Europeans in the group—became honorary Americans. Prior to the trip, we had all been asked to circulate, by email, short letters of introduction so that we would know a little about one another by the time we met. Mary Cay also recommended books and films that would give us some useful background to the country.

We spent the first eight days occupying the Hotel Karalinka, a lodge-style hotel set in peaceful woodland near the town of Bugojno, and by day four we had already worked our way through twenty-five new songs. In addition to Mary Cay, who taught a selection of shape note and gospel songs, we had three Bosnian teachers. Branka Vidović, an ethnomusicologist and co-director of the Sarajevo Music Academy Ethno-Choir, taught us traditional village songs—songs about shepherds, mountains, and spinning wool; humorous songs about courtship; and wedding songs. These we sang in smaller single-sex groups in the traditional open-throated style. Tijana Vignjević, an award-winning choir director and orchestra teacher who studied conducting at Sarajevo Music Academy and who also acted as local organiser for our tour, focused mainly on arrangements of *sevdalinka* songs (soulful love songs from urban traditions with a strong oriental lilt) that we sang with accordion and clarinet accompaniment; included here were some pieces that I had first encountered in the context of the British circle dance scene in the 1980s. Maja Budimir brought more complex but exquisitely beautiful Serbian Orthodox church songs and arrangements of songs from the Islamic *ilahiya* tradition. These were drawn from the repertoire of the Pontanima choir, an interreligious choir based at the monastery of St. Anthony in Sarajevo. Established in 1996 by Ivo Marković, a Franciscan priest, the choir had opened its membership to people of all faiths and included in its repertoire vocal music from the Catholic, Orthodox, Jewish, and Islamic traditions, using its performances as a tool to promote post-war reconciliation. We later met and sang with the choir in Sarajevo.

The impact of the war was only too evident. Many buildings still bore the scars of shelling; others lay in ruins; graveyards presented seemingly endless vistas of memorial stones, not yet weathered; and sections of woodland still to be cleared of mines were cordoned off with blue tape. Tijana and Maja also **(p.283)** talked about the effect of the war on their own lives. We sat outside on the terrace late into the night as Maja told us the story of how she had first made her way, with a young cousin, to relatives in Belgrade before leaving the country. Eventually she found herself in Bologna, where she won a scholarship and gained a degree, and from where she sent messages home via the Red Cross until she was eventually reunited with her mother more than four years later. Tijana told us about the girls' choir she joined (and later led) in Sarajevo that met to rehearse in a basement and functioned in part as a way of keeping young people away from the dangers of the street during the long years when the city was under siege. She also brought films about the war that we watched into the small hours, crowded around a laptop. Later, we drove deep into the mountains and spent a night (literally under canvas, for once) at a lakeside camp for children who had lost parents in the war.

People thanked us repeatedly for coming to Bosnia and taking such a keen interest in their culture. Far from being seen as uninvited guests riding roughshod over their territory or intruding on their still fragile lives in a

voyeuristic way, we were generally cast as playing a part in the country's reconstruction and healing. We were invited to receptions with local dignitaries; television and radio crews appeared to document our visit; Alen, who served our meals at the Hotel Karalinka, was thrilled to take us to visit his mosque and meet the imam; ordinary people we met on the street invited us into their homes and neighbours came running with pots of coffee, plates of cakes, raspberries from their gardens, and bottles of homemade plum brandy. Everywhere we went we sang, and because we had learnt a number of popular Bosnian songs by heart, as well as some dance steps, we were often able to join in when our new friends struck up a tune (Figure 8.6) (see web figure 08.18). People told us how important these songs had been in keeping up morale during the war. Sometimes they expressed gratitude for America's part in eventually helping bring the conflict to an end. Reference was made more particularly to the symbolism, in those days of George W. Bush's "war on terror", of Americans coming to a part-Muslim country. When we returned home, people would say, we could tell our compatriots that "Muslim" does not equal "terrorist."

Figure 8.6 Village Harmony camp participants singing with the late Omer Probić on a visit to his Sevdah Institute. Visoko, Bosnia, July 2008.

Source: Courtesy of Caroline Bithell.

For our final performance, on the steps of Sarajevo cathedral, we were part of a multi-choir extravaganza that in turn was part of the festival Baščaršijske Noći, and as the only choir from outside Bosnia-Hercegovina we were treated as guests of honour. At every concert our renditions of Islamic *ilahiya* songs, such as "Ej, Allahu, Pogledaj Me", had been greeted with approval and delight; this time we got a rapturous standing ovation before we had even reached the second verse. Lines such as "Rain will wash Bosnia / Lilies will flower in the early dawn / It will hold out to our children a bouquet of violets / And to me a dream of freedom and peace / The pain will pass when I close my eyes" (from another *ilahiya*, "Puhnut Će Behar") also had an obvious poignancy and communicated our empathy with our Bosnian hosts. At the end of the Sarajevo **(p.284)** concert, singers from the other choirs, to whom we had sent words and music in advance, joined us for "Oh, What a Beautiful City"—a song that we dedicated, of course, to Sarajevo.

Village Harmony and Other Travels in Georgia

In July 2010, I joined Village Harmony for their tenth singing camp in Georgia. Again, the majority of participants were from the United States, with young people in their teens or early twenties making up two-thirds of the group; three of us came from the United Kingdom and one from Switzerland. Our Georgian singing and dance teachers, some originating from Svaneti and the others from Kakheti, were all members of the group Zedashe. Our first week was spent in the Svan village of Ushguli, where we took possession of a newly opened rustic guesthouse and had the use of an old stone barn for our daily rehearsals. Later we stayed for a few days with the family and neighbours of a bagpipe-maker and player at the tiny village of Qvashta in the hills of Adjara, not far from the Black Sea and the Turkish border. During the final part of the tour, we were based in the historic fortress town of Sighnaghi in Kakheti, eastern Georgia, that is home to Zedashe and where Village Harmony now **(p.285)** has its own retreat centre in the form of two renovated houses providing both rehearsal space and accommodation. (Several of the young people in our party stayed on after the singing camp for the month-long language camp that Village Harmony also ran from its Sighnaghi base.) Additional towns and villages were included in our concert schedule, with venues ranging from the rather grand Ilia Chavchavadze Theatre in the coastal city of Batumi to a small outdoor stage in the Kakhetian town of Akhmeta. This itinerary gave us the opportunity to immerse ourselves in sharply contrasting landscapes while absorbing the musical styles of the different regions and meeting with many different groups of singers and dancers (see web figures 08.19–08.26).

Our itinerary also included visits to numerous monasteries and churches. Christianity was introduced to Georgia in the first century, and the country formally converted in 337 CE, making Georgia the world’s second oldest Christian nation after Armenia. The country is home to extraordinary complexes of cave monasteries, such as those at Davit-Gareja, dating from the sixth century; other important monastic centres like Gelati date from the twelfth century. The experience of listening to members of Zedashe singing medieval polyphonic chants in these settings and, later in the trip, singing these same chants ourselves featured prominently among the most powerful and transcendent moments that my fellow campers recalled months after our visit.

For co-director Patty Cuyler, the Georgian experience encapsulates all that Village Harmony stands for. Several key ingredients combine to make a profound and lasting impression that draws many participants back for return visits: an usually rich and varied palette of multipart song styles, dramatic unspoilt landscapes, the palpable presence of ancient spirituality that has been revitalised following Georgia’s independence from the Soviet Union, and a degree of hospitality that most participants have never before encountered. A number of younger people who attended earlier camps have returned on Fulbright scholarships and are now reasonably fluent in the Georgian language,

while one member of the teaching team for Village Harmony's own language course is an American college tutor who, after taking part in a singing camp, was inspired to give up her job back home and move to Georgia. As Patty explains it:

> Georgia's magic; it just feels like the homeland that's disappeared for people....Being here, making music and being guests in Georgia, hearing the stories, riding through the countryside, seeing the mélange of rough natural beauty and the skeletal, stagnated remains of the Soviet era, the poverty and the wealth and the dignity of the people, just gives people, everyone, a new way of looking at life...everyone will say that their values shifted.
>
> (Cuyler interview 2010)

Our evening meals served as important focal points, not only for singing but also for learning about Georgian history and culture. In Georgia, the guest is seen as a gift from God and friendship between guest and host is cemented **(p.286)** through the ritual of the *supra*, a lavish feast animated by eloquent toasts and impassioned singing. In Georgian culture as a whole, the *supra* fulfils an important psychosocial function, reinforcing and celebrating bonds between individuals and communities. Early on in the trip, we were initiated into the etiquette of the *supra* and the art of toasting by John Wurdeman, an American artist married to Zedashe member Ketevan Mindorashvili. John masterminded the logistics of our tour, acted as our guide at the historic sites we visited en route, and played a vital role as intermediary and translator at the tables we shared with our hosts in each new place. The speech that precedes a toast is often a highly poetic, deeply philosophical exegesis on a given theme, and the subjects of the toasts follow a ritual order. John skilfully drew us all into the spirit of the undertaking and we learnt how to make appropriate responses or raise our own toasts when invited to do so by the *tamada* (toast-master). Each night we drank to God and to Georgia; to our ancestors and children; to poetry and music; to our new friendship and to understanding between our countries; to love and to peace in the world. The heightened conviviality that prevailed at these times—the combination of sentiment, song, and copious amounts of good food and wine often giving rise to feelings of blissful transportation—was also, for many participants, a profoundly affective experience that left them with an enduring sense of gratitude and enrichment.

At the same time, the families and communities who hosted us benefited directly through the payments they received for providing us with board and lodging; this money was often to be invested in basic amenities such as indoor plumbing (as yet the exception in many Georgian villages). We also hired local drivers and their vehicles and bought musical instruments and handicrafts to take home. At a less tangible level, we were in some way reflecting back to our hosts images of

themselves with which they may, in some respects, have lost touch. Some of the songs that are learnt on such trips, for example, are no longer widely sung in present-day Georgia but are now in the process of being revived by the Georgian singers acting as teachers. As well as consulting with the older generation of songmasters, many of the younger members of contemporary ensembles assiduously mine the archives and apply themselves to deciphering the transcriptions they find in old manuscripts; through their own performances, they then breathe new life into the songs of past generations. Some of the songs we sang in our concerts were therefore new to our Georgian audiences and, for older listeners, may have evoked memories of a bygone age. The spectacle of young people from a distant country performing the “old” songs and dances with such enthusiasm and evident enjoyment, it was suggested, also helped recommend them to younger generations of Georgians whose abandonment of their own cultural heritage in favour of the more novel distractions of the modern age is often lamented by their grandparents (see video tracks 08.04–08.06).

The desire to interest the younger generation in maintaining local traditions was part of the story behind my return to Svaneti in the summer of 2011. In **(p.287)** this case, an invitation was issued by the host community—in collaboration with the charity Ecologia Youth Trust, operating from the Findhorn Foundation in Scotland and working in conjunction with Tbilisi-based charity Braveheart Georgia, run by Madge Bray (from Edinburgh) and Georgian singer Nana Mzhavanadze—for a group of sympathetic foreign guests to join them for the celebration of the feast of Limkheri and to learn the pre-Christian songs and dances to be performed for the occasion. The project’s website carried the statement:

> If managed carefully, the elders propose that the interest generated by this extraordinary invitation may serve to send a powerful message to their own young people—children who have been born into a modern Georgia and a new generation of “virtual” communications. They hope that this invitation will send out a clear message about the intrinsic value of roots, and about the spirit of a shared humanity—a birthright still intact here.
>
> (http://www.braveheartgeorgia.org/important.html, acc. July 2, 2011)

The majority of those who responded this time were from Britain and Ireland, and they included several community choir leaders and singers from dedicated Georgian choirs; others came from Germany and Finland. Most had a direct personal connection with Madge or Nana; in recent years, Nana has made regular visits to the United Kingdom and other parts of Western Europe to lead workshops and to appear in concerts with the ensemble Sathanao, to which one of the young Lakhushdi women driving the initiative also belongs. On this trip, we were housed with local families for the full two weeks and we took part in

various domestic activities alongside our singing sessions. The profits from our visit were used to launch a cooperative (Union Lidbashi) to oversee the development of a sustainable community enterprise, in which projects aimed at preserving and transmitting the local heritage were combined with the goal of "helping inhabitants of mountainous regions of Georgia create a better touristic atmosphere" (https://www.facebook.com/Lidbashi, acc. June 19, 2013).[17] The cooperative's initial projects included making documentary films about local rituals, founding a heritage centre in the village, and establishing a new children's choir, as well as providing lighting for the village square, contributing to improved facilities in the homes of the host families, and financing urgent repairs to a bridge.[18] It will be interesting to monitor future developments here, in particular with regard to the desired revitalisation of local traditions[19] (see web figures 08.27–08.29 and video tracks 08.07–08.14).

Of Refashioning Identities and Living Differently

In his contribution to a special issue of the *British Journal of Ethnomusicology* on Music and Meaning, Timothy Rice (2001) identifies a series of metaphors **(p. 288)** that may be applied to music. His examples include music as art, music as social behaviour, music as emotional expression, music as entertainment, music as commodity, and music as referential symbol. Veit Erlmann has suggested that "the essence of art no longer lies beyond the work of art, in a meaning, but in the interaction to which it gives rise" (1996b: 481). It is this metaphor—art or music as interaction—that has emerged most forcefully in this chapter.

The notion of community has, once again, been at the forefront throughout this discussion. Community itself is prefaced on the need for interaction and collaboration, for listening and understanding, for adapting and accommodating, and for working above all to maintain social health and harmony. Music, and more specifically singing, presents itself as an ideal tool to help promote such a state; and even without such deliberate intention, musical interaction may lead to the sense of being in community as one of its more predictable side effects. We have already engaged with the idea that music can do this kind of work not only for groups of people who come into regular contact and share many aspects of the wider culture (where, in Putnam's terms, it has a bonding function); it can also do similar work among strangers who may not even have a common spoken language (in which case, it serves a bridging function). The examples I have included in this chapter offer ample evidence of music in action, predominantly in its bridging capacity.

The liminal nature of the kinds of meetings and interludes I have described inevitably intensifies the affective experience. For travellers, the novelties they encounter at almost every turn put them in a receptive frame of mind and may predispose them to anticipate positive experiences. It is hardly surprising, then, that self-reported peak experiences—whether of personal euphoria or transpersonal connectedness—should figure so prominently. Of even greater

significance is that fact that the work of music in this sense reaches beyond the immediate and most visible task of orchestrating face-to-face encounters in the moment. There are also long-term consequences for both individual travellers and the communities with which they engage. Things change: materially, psychologically, and existentially. These changes are more often experienced as positive than negative: greater happiness, satisfaction, confidence, creativity, and gratitude; a deeper understanding, a more refined sense of accountability; a renewed commitment to finding ways to incorporate greater integrity into one's day-to-day life, to achieve a healthier balance between work and leisure, to make more time for friends and family.

Camps and overseas travels, as prolonged "time out", give participants the time and space to experiment with living differently. Relationships with others and with the environment may be reconfigured, the self experienced in new ways. The Unicorn camp, Village Harmony tours, and choir exchanges of the kind I have described offer an opportunity not only to recreate community but also to revive, or be re-educated in, the art of festivity and to experience the healing power of collective joy. If we follow Barbara Ehrenreich's arguments, **(p.289)** this is another level at which such initiatives have the potential to contribute in quite profound ways to the health and wellbeing of societies as well as individuals. Again, it is crucial to underline that, for many, such experiences are not merely a passing moment, a temporary high. They may have the force of a more permanent conversion, after which an individual will take concrete steps towards living differently. When people say (as they so often do) that discovering the Unicorn camp or Village Harmony, or going to Georgia or South Africa, changed their life, they often mean this in a quite literal sense. The path is not necessarily smooth: there are challenges and discomforts along the way. This in itself is one reason why such endeavours cannot simply be dismissed as the acting out of a tribal fantasy. Paul Stoller, alluding to the manner in which the modernist project is seen to have profoundly dehumanised society and caused many of its subjects to lose sight of what is most important, evocatively writes:

> Here and there, the wise ones find their way to a clearing—spaces where they fashion stories, laced with subjectivities, which restore some of that lost dignity. This ongoing process of restoration is central…to the contemporary human condition.
>
> (Stoller 2002: 229)

The sites and spaces in the landscape that the Unicorn camp temporarily occupies and to which Village Harmony takes its travelling groups are significant for the way in which they may also reveal metaphorical clearings where new insights and aspirations find a place to take root.

Thomas Turino has written of the way in which the performing arts serve as fulcrums of identity, allowing people to feel part of a community through the realisation of “shared cultural knowledge and style” as well as through the act of participating together. This creates a sense of “social intimacy”, the signs of which “are experienced directly—body to body—and thus in the moment are felt to be true” (2008: 3). For Turino, too, the impact of these experiences beyond the original moment in which they occur is of paramount interest. He harnesses James Lea’s terms of reference in proposing that “musical experiences foreground the crucial interplay between the Possible and the Actual” (Turino 2008: 16, referencing Lea 2001). In this sense, art itself may be seen as “time out”:

> The arts are a realm where the impossible or non-existent or the ideal is imagined and made possible, and new possibilities leading to new lived realities are brought into existence in perceivable forms.
>
> (Turino 2008: 18)

George Lipsitz has pursued a similar line of thought in his writings on popular culture, again pointing to the realities that lie beyond a mere utopian fantasy:

> Culture enables people to rehearse identities, stances, and social relations not yet permissible in politics. But it also serves as a concrete social site, a place **(p.290)** where social relations are constructed and enacted as well as envisioned. Popular culture does not just reflect reality, it helps constitute it.
>
> (Lipsitz 1994: 137)

Simon Frith offers another variation on the theme of the interplay between the possible and the actual:

> Identity is always an ideal, what we would like to be, not what we are....What makes music special is that musical identity is both fantastic—idealizing not just oneself but also the social world one inhabits—and real: it is enacted in activity.
>
> (Frith 1996b: 273–274)

What we would like to be need not remain a fantasy. The notion of identity as something malleable that may, to some extent, be refashioned has now become a familiar trope. Yet this does not mean, as Stuart Hall has been at pains to point out, that identity should be seen as “just a free-floating smorgasboard—you get up today and decide to be whoever you’d like to be”. On the contrary, “identity is always tied to history and place, to time, to narratives, to memory and ideologies” (2008: 347). These elements may nonetheless be drawn from a greater or lesser choice of variables. The narratives and memories that an

individual accumulates, and the ideologies he or she embraces, will become component parts of that person’s identity.

These thoughts may be linked to the more pragmatic observation that not everyone feels at home with, or chooses to live their whole life within the confines of, the society into which they were born. As Ulf Hannerz puts it:

> They were perhaps never wholeheartedly for it [“their” culture] in the first place.…Presented with alternatives to the culture they have lived by, they might at times prefer to pursue these—whether or not they understand them in detail, and in their implications.
>
> (Hannerz 1996: 58)

They may not feel at home in their own skin, which may in any case hide a complex story of mixed ancestry, and this may in part explain the uncanny sense of homecoming they feel when they arrive somewhere else. For David Hollinger, the expectation that “individuals would naturally accept the social, cultural and political habits popularly ascribed to their communities of descent”—an expectation that he characterises as “deeply anti-individualist and anti-voluntarist”—was a serious stumbling block in the multiculturalism of the 1990s (2005: 220). It is for this reason that cosmopolitanism has recommended itself to so many contemporary cultural theorists as a more attractive proposition than multiculturalism. The voice of Kwame Anthony Appiah (2005) has been among the most energetic in arguing for the individual’s right to choose, reinvent, and continuously reconfigure his or her identity (or identities), free from the tyranny of the established script of the society to which **(p.291)** he or she ostensibly belongs. With equal force, Appiah has argued for our need to redraw the imaginary boundaries that have been erected between nations, cultures, and religions and remind ourselves of the powerful ties that connect rather than divide.

Cosmopolitanism has long provided a conceptual home for those whose horizons extend beyond the immediate skyline. Among the less satisfactory aspects of the classic, Kantian understanding of cosmopolitanism is the notion that the cosmopolitan, as a citizen of the world, is at home everywhere and nowhere. A cosmopolitan does not have to be proudly and resolutely rootless, however. Rather than always passing through, we may put down roots in different places and the friends we make in those places may become part of our elective extended family. Like many of the Village Harmony singers who have found their way to Georgia, we may be drawn to return and play a more integral part in the communities that have in some way adopted us. These kinds of “transethnic cultural relationships based upon affinity” can, as Richard Blaustein puts it, “supplement and even come to replace classical communal relationships grounded in kinship and territoriality” (1993: 271–272).

Alongside Mark Slobin's notion of "affinity groups" that lies behind Blaustein's observation, Turino's concept of "cultural cohorts" also recommends itself as a suitable descriptor for the translocal and transnational groups for which the Unicorn and Village Harmony camps serve as meeting grounds. The value of such cohorts, as Turino envisages them, lies in their potential to function as springboards for individual and social change, but "without requiring a transformation of everything at once":

> Cohorts allow people to begin where and with the "whos" that they are and, if so inclined, to begin working toward their vision of a satisfying life "part time," supported by others of like mind.
>
> (Turino 2008: 230)

Turino cites as an example the scenes that grew up around American old-time music and dance, whose revival in the 1960s was linked with the back-to-the-land ideologies of a counterculture opposed to the basic tenets of the dominant capitalist cultural formation. Because an initial musical interest opened windows onto other lives lived differently, these scenes provided both model and support for some of their members to make gradual but ultimately profound changes in the way they lived their own lives (2008: 115). Turino's conviction that the personal stories that emerge from what might seem like very circumscribed scenes or modest movements do, in fact, represent a significant force for social change is reflected in his adaptation of Leopold Kohr's mantra as the subheading of one of the final sections of his book: "Small Is Still Beautiful".[20] Here, he envisages a process of gradual expansion as links are formed between different cohorts and, in time, the networks that are thereby created gather sufficient weight and momentum to provide the foundation for **(p.292)** broader cultural formations offering a viable alternative to the dominant formation. The counter-argument offered by Ulf Hannerz to the unfortunate (in his view) but pervasive idea that the media have a unique role as "the principal vehicle of culture production and distribution" might be applied just as well to the kind of cultural process Turino describes, which in turn may be mapped onto my own story: "The everyday and face-to-face may be small-scale; in the aggregate, it is massive" (Hannerz 1996: 28).

Notes:

(1.) For most of its life, the Unicorn camp has had a "no photography" policy. A small selection of images can be found on the website http://www.unicorncamps.com/. From 2013, campers were encouraged to post their own photographs on the camp's new Facebook page.

(2.) The speaker is not named in the film.

(3.) It is interesting to note here that the very first trip offered by Thomas Cook, founder of what is now one of the major package tour operators, was a day trip by train from Leicester to Loughborough to attend a temperance meeting. Cook saw travel not only as a democratic right but also as a means of keeping the masses out of the public house or alehouse.

(4.) The notion of front and back regions is borrowed from Erving Goffman.

(5.) In 2013, the camp moved to a new site on the Somerset–Wiltshire borders.

(6.) Compiled by tax collector and amateur folklorist Alexander Carmichael (1832–1912), the collection was originally published in six volumes. A single-volume English-language edition was published in 1992 as *Carmina Gadelica: Hymns and Incantations Collected in the Highlands and Islands of Scotland in the Last Century*.

(7.) The material acquired its name after Nickomo had been teaching the early chants for a year or two and realised that he had created a new sub-genre.

(8.) Tony Backhouse also refers to the need to reserve a place for “nonspecific spirituality, spirituality that doesn’t necessarily attach itself to a label or a messiah” as part of his explanation for the appeal of gospel music to non-believers (quoted in Johnson 2003: 166).

(9.) The Harmonic Temple material also reaches a wider constituency through the dedicated weekend workshops that Nickomo and Rasullah lead in different parts of the United Kingdom and beyond. At the same time, another free-floating community is formed by the volunteers from across the UK who make up the choir for the performance CD that accompanies each new collection.

(10.) These podcasts are available for streaming or download on the Unicorn website: see http://www.unicorncamps.com/.

(11.) The term “interaction ritual” originated with Erving Goffman.

(12.) Bardsey, occupying an area of only two square kilometres but known as “the island of 20,000 saints” after the number of saints reputed to have been buried there, had a monastery dating back to 516 (demolished by Henry VIII) and was an important site of pilgrimage in the medieval period. Iona, often represented as the cradle of Scottish Christianity, also had a monastery founded in 563; the small graveyard next to the restored abbey that now occupies the site of the original monastery is believed to be the burial place of forty-eight medieval kings of Scotland, Ireland, and Norway.

(13.) Several NVPN members now lead singing holidays in various overseas locations. Examples can be found on the websites of many of the individual

practitioners listed on the companion website (see Who’s Who: Practitioners Featured in the Book).

(14.) An archive of colourful diary-like accounts of exchange visits between Sedbergh and Zreče dating back to 2004 can be found at http://sedberghinternational.blogspot.co.uk/, acc. July 12 2013.

(15.) At the time of completing this manuscript, a full description of the trip, together with photographs and video clips, can be found at http://www.roughdiamonds.info/visittothedc.html, acc. July 12 2013.

(16.) Earlier discussions of Village Harmony’s Corsican camps can be found in Bithell 2009 and 2012.

(17.) For a more detailed account of how this initiative came into being and how the cooperative operates, see Bray and Mzhavanadze 2013.

(18.) Union Lidbashi’s Facebook page (https://www.facebook.com/Lidbashi) features a wealth a fascinating photographs of old Svaneti, alongside video clips of rituals as they are still performed today.

(19.) For a more detailed discussion of the part played by foreign enthusiasts and performers of Georgian polyphony in Georgia’s own cultural renaissance, and more broadly in its strategic repositioning of itself in the contemporary geopolitical arena, see Bithell 2013.

(20.) The formulation “small is beautiful” was immortalised in the best-selling book by Kohr’s student, British economist E. F. Schumacher, whose *Small is Beautiful: A Study of Economics as if People Mattered* was first published in 1973.